

Darren Stewart
MDC Brooklyn
80 29th Street
Brooklyn, NY 11232

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VIA ECF

The Honorable William Kuntz
United States District Court
Eastern District of New York
225 Cadman Plaza East
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Re: *United States of America v. Darren Stewart*
Case No. 21 cr. 42 (WFK)

Dear Judge Kuntz,

I dictated this letter to my lawyers with the intention to give you some insight into who I am as a person: my personality; my own perspective regarding my troubles; the challenges in my life; and my past and present as a productive member of society. I do not intend to seek your sympathy, your forgiveness or your acceptance that the offenses for which I am charged are morally justified. I do, however, hope you can understand how much I regret my terrible mistakes.

Moving forward, I will make every effort to rid my life of the very essence of what initiated my poor decision making, to seek the necessary psychological and addiction assistance, to redeem myself for my family, my friends and society. I will *never* walk down this path again. My actions were unlawful, and the content depicted in those images and videos were more than harmful.

My singular crime of providing this profane content to an undercover officer is directly tied to one of the darkest points of my life and was fueled by addiction. This is not an excuse, but an explanation. I am deeply sorry for my actions, and have been reflecting throughout my incarceration about how I could have allowed myself to be in this situation, one I never would have expected to be in.

Growing up, I was bullied at school, and was beaten up by other kids often. Home was no reprieve, as I was beaten nearly daily by my father, who would use a leather switch to punish me. My mother often encouraged him to do so, and this combined effort from my parents often made me feel unwelcome and worthless in my own home.

Throughout my youth, between the ages of 10 and 14, I was repeatedly sexually assaulted by my uncle, my mother's brother. I was both molested and anally raped by him at family outings and sleepovers at his residence. He would also masturbate over me. When I told my mother about this behavior on one occasion, she did not believe me, blamed me for having dirty thoughts, and I eventually received another beating for talking poorly about her brother. I never brought this abuse up to her again, as I feared repercussions.

While he would eventually go on to be charged criminally in connection to similar behavior he was undertaking with his own children, I did not testify against him, uncomfortable

with being open about my experiences. This led to his acquittal and the eventual suicide of his son, my cousin. I continue to regret my decision not to testify, and I often wonder how different things could have been had I spoken up.

After my youth, though, life began to improve, and I became a paramedic, a job that I loved dearly, and was able to help people across the area in Australia in which I was raised. In addition, I fell in love and I got married to my ex-wife Annette. We had two beautiful children together, Melleesa and Kyle. I love being a father and my connection with my children is one of the most important things to me in the world and despite not speaking with them or seeing them, it's what keeps me going in prison.

While I still consider my marriage to be beautiful and one of the best times of my life, throughout it I was still hiding part of myself: the fact that I was, and am, a gay man. Ultimately, I decided to come out to my (nuclear) family. And while it ended my marriage and – originally - was quite upsetting to my ex-wife, my family was still very supportive of me, and we remained incredibly active in each other's lives.

I would eventually move to the United States in 2013, hesitant to leave my family but ultimately excited to begin a new life with my partner at the time. I would eventually live and move in with my new partner, Kang Peng, and continued to live with him as friends following our split in 2019.

In 2019, I began using dating apps, and was invited to a sex party in the Bronx with other gay men. This is where I would be introduced to methamphetamine and "K" (a sedative). This is where my life took a turn I never could have expected, and I became heavily dependent on meth. I began attending these sex parties often, always in the same apartment and always with the same men.

The sex parties I attended were only attended by other adult men. We would use my phone and laptop to project pornography onto a screen. When I first became involved with the group this would exclusively be adults, but the videos slowly migrated to more profane images, before it eventually became child pornography and while I derived no sexual gratification from these photos, I didn't protest, and that was my grave mistake. I ask you to understand that *I am not a pedophile*.

During these parties, I was always under the influence of methamphetamine. I would often black out during these events and would not remember what I had done the night before. But due to my dependence on the drugs involved, I could not stop myself from attending. Eventually I would begin to see one of these men alone, and here we too would use drugs and he would ask to view child porn, which I agreed to. I eventually realized how detrimental to my health both the drugs and this content were and tried to distance myself from members of the group. I bought a new computer and phone as well.

I had never looked at pornography involving minors prior to these sex parties and my drug use, and after breaking up with the group have never viewed it again. Despite ending my affiliation with this group, I was arrested and since have been detained at MDC Brooklyn. I have not been able to stop thinking about what I have done since, and deeply regret my involvement. I have no intention of ever consuming content similar to that which has placed me in jail again.

My time from MDC has been far from easy, for reasons unrelated to me reflecting on my actions and what I have done to arrive here. For the vast majority of the time during which I was incarcerated here, COVID-19 was raging and visiting rights were heavily restricted. Beyond this though were the conditions in MDC that staff members continue to ignore. As you probably know, due to the pandemic we were regularly locked in our cells from 7am-9pm without relief. While this is frustrating, what is even more upsetting is the conditions in which these lock ins occurred. My lights in my cell regularly go out and I was forced to sit in darkness for days at a time before the lightbulbs were switched. I was unable to use the gym, or the church. While I could take showers, the conditions were so filthy that I had genuine fear for my wellbeing while showering. Additionally, I became seriously ill, an experience that has only exacerbated the conditions here.

I had what felt like a bladder infection, and could not urinate without pain for three days. I had submitted a request to see a doctor, but these could take weeks to get approved, so I was not sure when I would get the chance to actually see one.

On the third day, I could not urinate and felt my bladder was really full. I could not get down the steps because I felt so much pain. Two MS-13 gang members took me down the steps and dragged me to a Corrections Officer and said I needed help. The CO called the doctor, and the doctor came about an hour later asking for my sick pool paperwork. When I told him I did not have any yet, he refused to see me and left. He told me I needed to go upstairs but I could not walk. The two MS-13 members put more pressure on the CO, before they called a nurse. She said my bladder was taut and I needed to be treated. They eventually took me to a local hospital ER in a stretcher, but they were not able to put a catheter in. A nurse practitioner tried to insert the catheter next, and he said there was internal bleeding. I was then transferred to the Kingsbrook Jewish Medical Center, where I stayed for about five days before being transferred back to MDC. I am grateful I am okay, but it was quite a traumatic experience, and there were times throughout the experience where I was unsure if I would make it out alive.

While I can't definitively say I had COVID-19 because I was never tested, I can tell you I became inexplicably ill multiple times throughout the pandemic without medical treatment. The delays I experienced were not only in medical treatment though. I also faced delays and restrictions in meeting with my attorneys. In fact, I can recall one meeting where I was only able to meet with them for 15 minutes of my scheduled hour because of a shutdown in my block. This whole situation is extremely stressful and emotionally draining, but not being able to meet with the people I hired to help and defend me was especially hard.

At MDC Brooklyn I have also joined several work programs. I work full time in the Kitchen, which I enjoy. I have also completed a program to be a suicide companion and have achieved over 100 hours of service within the program. The program entails sitting outside the cell of an inmate on suicide watch and keeping them company for 6-hour shifts. During these shifts I am able to interact with the inmate and am responsible for letting staff know if they are about to do anything to harm themselves. In order to be a part of this program, you must be recommended by a CO who has recognized your potential to complete the task. I find this program quite rewarding and enjoy having the ability to help people again. It reminds me of my time as a paramedic, and I enjoy the opportunity to help people continue to appreciate their lives. I have also completed Quiet Moments, a therapy program, under Dr. Alcide.

Moving forward, I hope to channel this energy I have for helping people into finding a new path for myself. I understand what I did was wrong, and I accept responsibility for that. I can honestly say that I have reflected upon and rebuked my actions. I intend to spend the rest of my life working towards maintaining the character my family and friends have always loved and respected me for regardless of the outcome of my case.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Darren Stewart